

## THE RED STRATEGY

Ott, K. (2005). The RED Strategy. COMPEER, Volume 2 Issue 1, 2005.

*How do people "switch off" afterwards and move onto other things? It's all part of healthy "disengagement" - looking after ourselves so we can keep looking after other people. This article is a short summary of a seminar presentation by Karen Ott:*

Acronyms, acronyms! But they can be a good mnemonic to remember strategies, and in this instance ACT CISM uses RED Strategy as an acronym for REFERRAL, EVALUATION and DISENGAGEMENT. (Note that this acronym has been used for other things!)

There are several aspects to consider in REFERRAL. First, in any work relationship we need to consider our BOUNDARIES – the limits of the relationship or contract. It is an old but true saying: "To look after others you need to look after yourself". In setting boundaries (for any type of situation) it is desirable to establish these as soon as possible. In counselling it is best to establish the boundaries FROM THE FIRST INTERVIEW. In Project Management boundaries can be specified at the planning stage. Not only do clear boundaries protect all parties involved, but it also models appropriate behaviour for those counselling clients that have boundary or enmeshment issues. Boundaries are something that you build and develop. There are some that are imposed - by your organisation, policy or professional codes of conduct. But other boundaries are those which you develop for yourself.

So how can we ensure that a boundary is adequately understood by all stakeholders?

Put it in writing. In the terms of Project Management, this can be a contractual agreement to carry out a particular project. It is usually accompanied by a duty statement, which defines the parameters of your job or role. In counselling with a client, it may involve a pamphlet that lays out the parameters of the counselling service. A pamphlet about services provided (and limits) might be useful for a Peer Supporter too. Peer Support programs usually include this type of information in their organisation promotion. There are rights and responsibilities pertinent to all parties involved - that is, for both you and the client / stakeholders.

Be consistent. Always carry through with what you have stated. If you demonstrate a willingness to cross a boundary once, there may be expectations that it can happen again.

Rights and Responsibilities. You have a right to any boundary that you have negotiated with the client / stakeholder, as do they. No one has to defend or justify them. Once boundaries for all parties involved are agreed to, they need to be respected.

So having established BOUNDARIES this brings us to REFERRAL. If we have just finished a counselling interview and both you and your client agree to continue onto another session, then the referral is to yourself. If you have finished a project then referral is to the purchaser of services, or management or other stakeholder.

However you may be coming to the end of a counselling relationship. In this case it will

help you to move on if you and the person have adequately planned for the next step. This is sometimes known as DISCHARGE PLANNING. Referral under these circumstances may be to another agency or self-help group. Alternatively the person may require no further professional intervention, however a discharge plan can include items about relapse. It should be emphasised that relapse is not inevitable, but that should it occur the person will have planned to manage it. Discharge planning gives both you and the person peace of mind, and this makes it easier to "move on".

The next step is to EVALUATE the case. There are two aspects to this. First it is helpful both in the terms of your own personal evaluation and project / counselling service management to elicit feedback from the client / stakeholders. This will be done to some extent when you discuss terminating your relationship, but offering an opportunity for people to put it on paper can be a good way to summarise the experience for you both. You may have a formal evaluation form (tool) that you use for this purpose. If you do not, then it is helpful to develop one.

The second aspect is to examine your own involvement on the personal level. A number of questions can help guide you through this: · Did things go "according to plan"? Has the Discharge Plan covered any areas of concern? Were there areas that went particularly well or areas that could have been covered better? What additional tools, resources, knowledge would help me in the future? What have I learnt from this experience? In the terms of Project management, this is where a Mentor can come in useful. You would be able to explore these types of issues with an independent person and receive external validation. In the same way, professional supervision for counsellors is important. There are many types of professional supervision: mentor, teaching, mutual, peer groups etc. All of these have something valuable to offer a counsellor in the terms of self-care and development.

The last part is about DISENGAGEMENT - time to mentally "move on". There are some useful strategies that allow you to disengage from a case and turn your attention elsewhere. First there are various thought stopping techniques. For example, every time thoughts about a particular case or project come to mind, find something to distract yourself with. This is more successful with prior planning & preparation! Some sort of hobby that you find interesting or a project that requires some planning (like a trip away) are all good distractions. Notice the similarities - these are all things that look ahead (a forward perspective). It helps reorient your thinking, instead of over-analysing the past.

Using personal stress management strategies is also useful. Physical activity is important in both stress and depression recovery, and planning some enjoyable exercise will help with healthy disengagement too. Social support is another important factor - talking it through or spending time on an event not related to the case helps get things back into perspective. There are many more strategies for thought stopping, stress management and disengagement in general than can be covered in this overview of the RED Strategy Seminar – more information on these or any other aspects briefly covered in this article can be obtained from ACT CISM office@act-cism.org.au